

FORT MCKINLEY,
SOUTH FORK LATRINE

HAER No. ME-59-F

On west side of East Side Drive approximately
225 feet south of Weymouth Way
on Great Diamond Island
Portland
Cumberland County
Maine

HAER
ME
3-PORT
27F-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

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**HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
FORT MCKINLEY,
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Location:

On west side of East Side Drive approximately 225 feet south of
Weymouth Way on Great Diamond Island
Portland, Cumberland County, Maine

UTM: 19.4040100.4836790
Quad: Portland East, ME, 1:24,000

Date of Construction:

1909

Architects & Engineers:

Army Corps of Engineers

Present Owners:

McKinley Partners Limited Partnership

Present Use:

Vacant

Significance:

Fort McKinley attains significance as the largest of Portland Harbor's five military complexes built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The fort protected Maine's principal city with one of the most well-defended harbors in the country. The South Fork Latrine is one of two identical buildings constructed at the fort. It is the only non-tactical structure located in the eastern portion of the South Fork.

Project Information:

This is one of nine structures at the fort to be documented in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement of 1989 as a mitigative measure prior to partial demolition of the structure.

Christine S. Beard
Tremont Preservation Services
10 Barr Street
Salem, MA 01970

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SITE

Fort McKinley occupies the northern half of Great Diamond Island in Maine's Casco Bay and is a part of the City of Portland. The South Fork Latrine is located on the eastern side of the island within bounds of Fort McKinley. It is set back from the road in a wooded area on the west side of East Side Drive.

DESCRIPTION

The South Fork Latrine is in poor condition, with most of the sash missing, roof severely deteriorated, and doors partially missing or off hinges. Measuring roughly 18' x 10', the structure was built in 1909 using the Sewell method of construction. This technique uses cement plaster over steel mesh on a wood or steel frame. The unpainted exterior took on a cream or light tan color. Resting on a concrete foundation, the building is enclosed by a shallow hip roof finished with tar and gravel. There are two entrances, one on both the east and west elevations. The entries contain wood doors with three rectangular panels set beneath a nine glazed panes (lower panels missing from east door). Remaining fenestration consists of one small square window south of each door, two small paired windows at the south elevation, and three small paired windows at the north elevation. Paired windows each contain two four-pane sash. There are no sash remaining. On the exterior, window and door openings are framed by flush wood trim. The interior is divided into two spaces: a small room at the west end containing a sink and toilet and a larger east room with sinks, urinals, and toilets lining the north and south walls. Interior finishes consist of concrete floors, rough plaster walls, and exposed roof framing. Door and window openings are framed with flush wood trim.

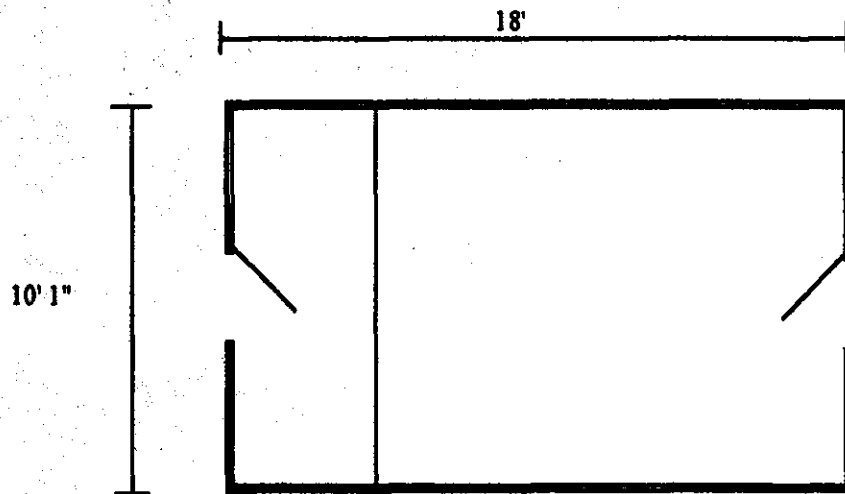
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Establishment of Fort McKinley was part of a larger effort by the government to provide strategic harbor defenses throughout the country, a practice begun in the late eighteenth century. Fort McKinley was the largest of four new fortifications established to protect the many avenues of entry into Portland Harbor at the turn-of-the-century. It was situated to deter entrance into the harbor from the north, particularly by way of Hussey Sound and Broad Sound. Plans for Fort McKinley included construction of nine gun batteries, facilities to mine the two major channels, and a large group of non-tactical structures including officers quarters, barracks, administrative buildings, and a variety of secondary structures. Included among the secondary structures are two free-standing latrines, one on the North Fork and another on the South Fork.

In 1905, under President Theodore Roosevelt, a board was appointed to evaluate the country's defenses. The Taft Board, headed by Secretary of War William H. Taft, made recommendations to improve the existing system for controlling the guns and mines. Rather than sighting guns directly, the board proposed to use a sophisticated observation system with optical instruments in the observation stations. Sightings would be sent by telephone into plotting rooms where the data was processed. In turn, ranges and directions were sent to the batteries. In response to the Taft Board recommendations, a number of additional tactical buildings (and additions to tactical buildings) were constructed at Fort McKinley. With the tactical buildings being somewhat isolated from the heart of the fort and increased numbers of soldiers required to man them, there was a need for easily accessible lavatory facilities. The South Fork Latrine is the only non-tactical structure at the east side of the island in an area of tactical buildings.

During WWII the Navy also established a strong presence in Portland Harbor, sharing responsibility for defense of the area with the Army. The Navy undertook a number of measures to supplement the work of the Army, including rigging submarine nets and sinking old ships between the islands and the mainland to completely enclose the harbor. By doing this, the batteries and mine casemates on the north and east shores of Fort McKinley were rendered superfluous. Consequently, only one battery at Fort McKinley needed to be manned. By 1943, as the threat of a major attack became unlikely, build-up of the coastal defenses greatly diminished and were virtually halted by 1940. Experiences during WWII, such as amphibious landings, air strikes, and the development of nuclear weapons and missiles all contributed to making harbor defenses like Fort McKinley obsolete. In 1950 the Coast Artillery was dissolved, the U.S. Army harbor defense commands were disbanded, and the forts were abandoned.

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South Fork Latrine
Floor Plan
[not to scale]



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North Fork Latrine (identical to South Fork Latrine)
Original Plan at National Archives (file no. DR 10-79-47)

